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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of dropout rates in New Mexico and reports the perceptions of Hispanic and Native American students on dropout-related issues. New Mexico has the third highest dropout rate in the nation. Over 7,500 students in New Mexico drop out each year, and many schools lose 30-50 percent of their students. Dropout rates are particularly alarming for Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans. In every ethnic group, males are more likely to drop out than females. Data tables present 1995-96 dropout rates for grades 9-12 by year, ethnic group, and gender and for grades 7-8 by ethnic group. A short literature review discusses the high national Hispanic dropout rate, regardless of socioeconomic class, immigrant status, or home language; the role of cultural discontinuity and racism in the high Native American dropout rate; the influence of poverty and social inequities on dropout rates; and evidence that school-related reasons contribute most to student decisions to drop out. Interviews with Hispanic and Native American students and parents at three New Mexico middle schools revealed some common themes: that teachers were uncaring, biased against students' cultures, and insensitive to students' difficulties at home; that school felt like a prison; and that friends, parents, extracurricular activities, and hands-on learning motivated students to stay in school. Effective dropout prevention strategies are described relating to teacher professional development, teacher support networks, the school environment, educational policy, community involvement, and research. An appendix briefly summarizes 30 dropout prevention programs in New Mexico. (Contains 40 references.) (SV)

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Dropouts in New Mexico: Native American and Hispanic Students Speak Out

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Hispanic and Native American Dropouts in New Mexico

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Executive Summary

In this report, the dropout crisis in the United States and in New Mexico is introduced. In the United States, it is expected that as many as 25% of all fifth graders will not graduate from high school (Mann, 1986; Rumberger, 1987). Studies have found that social economic class is the best predictor of who drops out of high school. In New Mexico, disproportionate numbers of Hispanics and Native Americans dropout. Data on dropouts in New Mexico from 1995-96 confirms that more males than females dropout in grades 9-12 across every ethnic group.

Reasons are suggested for why Hispanics and Native Americans leave high school at exceedingly high rates in New Mexico. Students from three middle schools in different regions of the state give their insights into why their friends and family members left school before graduating or are considering dropping out. Parents from one of the schools also contribute their opinions about what more schools can do to decrease the dropout rate.

Other sections in the report provide ideas about what teachers and schools can do to address the dropout problem. District, state and national policies are discussed vis-à-vis dropouts. How community-based organizations, business, and the larger community support programs for students at risk of dropping out is also discussed. Finally, the need for further research on the issues that affect dropouts and the development of innovative programs to prevent students from leaving school before graduation is discussed. The report concludes with a listing of prevention and intervention programs throughout New Mexico that are proving to be particular effective at decreasing the dropout rate.

Dedication

This report is dedicated to all of the students at "Soaring Eagle Middle School," "Monterey Middle School," and "El Rey Middle School" who shared with us some very personal stories about their lives.

Introduction

The high incidence of school dropout in the United States is a serious concern for parents, educators, politicians, and the general public. Because of rapid technological advances, education is crucial for preparing a knowledgeable, skilled, and flexible work force for the advanced industrial economy of the United States. Education prepares workers for immediate participation in the nation's economy and represents a long-term investment in the economic welfare of the country. The consequences of dropping out are life-long and life-altering for the individual, and threaten the effectiveness of the economy and the stability of society.

According to *No More Excuses: The Final Report of the Hispanic Dropout Project* (HDP), a student who drops out of high school is more likely to be unemployed, more likely to earn less when employed, and more likely to raise a family in poverty, thus putting the next generation at risk of dropping out, and repeating this cycle (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). High dropout rates lead to increased unemployment, increased demands on social services, and a less skilled work force (Rumberger, 1987). The employment possibilities for a high school dropout are greatly restricted (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a, p. 6). For example, dropouts in 1982 were twice as likely to be unemployed (42%) compared to 1982 high school graduates (23%) (Rumberger, 1987). The effects on an individual's lifetime earnings are even more dramatic: for Hispanic students, the projected loss in lifetime earnings for dropouts is $47.9 billion for the class of 1998 (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a).

But education should not be seen strictly in its relation to the economy; the capability of education to advance the social well-being of the United States and promote democratic values are also essential. Social peace in the United States is predicated on the possibility that all citizens, regardless of their economic and social status, can improve their lives. The dropout problem also threatens the future of American political institutions. The demands of democratic governance require an educated and well-informed citizenry to make

knowledgeable decisions about the increasingly complex social and political problems faced by contemporary society.

In this report, we describe a variety of issues that affect dropouts in New Mexico, while including a listing of programs being used throughout the state that have proven successful in both intervening and preventing students from dropping out of school. Data on school dropouts in the United States and New Mexico is initially presented to frame the problem. While exploring the factors that influence students to dropout of school, we provide insights from students from three middle schools located in different parts of the state who shared with us their ideas about what schools and society can do to address the dropout issue. Finally, what more we need to know about dropouts is considered.

Before proceeding, an explanation of the term dropout is necessary. The common usage of "dropout" signifies a student who leaves school before earning a diploma. This definition is interpreted differently by school districts by how they calculate the dropout rate. Schools differ on important data gathering methods such as how grades are used to count dropouts, the time span when dropouts are counted, and the definition of an absence. Frequently, accurate information about why students dropout of school is unavailable. Despite the difficulties that school districts have classifying and tracking dropouts, as many as 400 students are dropping out of school in New Mexico everyday and not returning to complete their high school diplomas (Bingaman, 1998). This statistic clearly illustrates that the dropout problem is acute in New Mexico's schools.

Data on Dropouts in the Nation

Some researchers predict that in the United States, it can be expected that as many as 25% of fifth graders will not graduate from high school (Mann, 1986; Rumberger, 1987). An ambitious study of high school dropouts which tracked a 1980 cohort of 30,000 high school sophomores over six years, the High School and Beyond (HS&B) study found that social economic class is the strongest predictor of who drops out of high school (Barro,

1984). The study documented that 22% from the lowest quartile and 8.9% from the highest quartile drop out (Rumberger, 1987). Among students in the lowest income quartile, Whites drop out considerably more often than African-Americans and Hispanics. However, in the highest income quartile, significantly fewer Whites drop out than others. According to Fine (1991), this data demonstrates that "wealth provides a substantially more efficient educational buffer for whites than for students of color" (p. 22).

The HS&B study also found that tracking or ability grouping was also associated with dropout rates (Barro, 1984). Overall, 26% of students in low-ability groups dropped out compared to only 3% of students in the high-ability groups. Ability grouping or "tracking" has resulted in students having varying access to educational opportunities (Oakes, 1985). With respect to disability, minority students are more likely to be placed in special education programs than Whites (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). Though PL 94-142 mandates parental involvement in the evaluation and placement of children in special education programs, Gartner and Lipsky (1987) found that parents were not involved in the development of Individualized Education Programs in 70% of the student cases surveyed.

The HS&B data (Barro, 1984) also indicates that young women drop out less frequently than young men across ability groups, especially in the higher quartiles (Barro, 1984). However, the study found that young women report dropping out for "family concerns" significantly more often than young men (37% of females versus 5% of males). Pregnancy, parenting, and marriage are much more disruptive of the education of young women than of young men (Fine, 1991). The HS&B study found that 50% of young mothers (compared to 30% of young fathers) drop out, and that as many as 75% of those married and parenting leave high school before graduating (Barro, 1984).

Data on Dropouts in New Mexico

New Mexico has the third highest dropout rate in the nation (Abeyta & Borgrink, 1997). Over 7,500 students in New Mexico dropout each year, and many schools lose between 30% and 50% of their students. The dropout rate is particularly alarming because of *who* is dropping out. In the state of New Mexico, the rate of Hispanic, African American and Native American high school incompletion, without obtaining a diploma or equivalency certificate such as a GED, has reached alarming levels. In a study completed by the New Mexico State Department of Education of the 1995-96 dropout rates of students throughout the state, it was discovered that across grades 9-12, Hispanics, African Americans, and Native Americans had the highest dropout rates of 10.8%, 10.6% and 8.6% respectively (see Table 1). The dropout rates for Asians and Whites were 6.5% and 5.9%, respectively.

TABLE 1: 1995-96 DROPOUT RATES BY ETHNICITY, GRADES 9-12

Ethnicity	9th Grade	10th Grade	11th Grade	12th Grade
African American	8.5%	12.0%	10.0%	7.1%
Asian	7.7%	5.0%	5.9%	5.6%
Hispanic	5.9%	10.2%	9.7%	7.5%
Native American	8.2%	9.7%	6.9%	5.6%
White (Anglo)	6.0%	5.5%	5.8%	4.6%

Source: New Mexico State Department of Education, Dropout Study 1995-96

Students were also dropping out earlier than in the past, often in middle and junior high. Data of the dropout rates for students in grades 7 and 8 in 1995-96 indicate that African Americans dropped out at the highest rates, while more Hispanic students dropped out than students from any other ethnic group (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: 1995-96 DROPOUT RATES BY ETHNICITY, GRADES 7 & 8

Ethnicity	Number of Dropouts	Membership*	Dropout Rate
African American	39	1,155	3.4%
Asian	4	453	0.9%
Hispanic	673	24,243	2.8%
Native American	163	5,854	2.8%
White (Anglo)	446	20,562	2.2%
		*40th day memberships	

Source: New Mexico State Department of Education, Dropout Study 1995-96

Data from the 1995-96 academic year illustrates that males were more likely than females to dropout of school in New Mexico in every ethnic groups (see Table 3). Hispanic females had the highest dropout rate in their gender group. Hispanic males dropped out at higher rates than males in the other ethnic groups.

TABLE 3: 1995-96 DROPOUT RATES BY ETHNICITY AND GENDER, GRADES 9-12

Ethnicity	Gender	Number of Dropouts	Membership*	Dropout Rate
African American	Female	100	1,007	9.9%
	Male	124	1,105	11.2%
Asian	Female	32	499	6.4%
	Male	37	570	6.5%
Hispanic	Female	1,993	19,896	10.0%
	Male	2,410	20,824	11.6%
Native American	Female	380	5,141	7.4%
	Male	493	5,019	9.8%
White (Anglo)	Female	969	17,996	5.4%
	Male	1,218	19,224	6.3%
			* 40th day memberships	

Source: New Mexico State Department of Education, Dropout Study 1995-96

An Introduction to Hispanic and Native American Dropouts in New Mexico

While dropouts are Native American, White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian, the majority are poor and members of a minority group. Data from the 1995-96 school year indicates that disproportionately large numbers of Hispanic (4,403) and Native American (873) students dropped out of school in New Mexico (Abeyta & Borgrink, 1997). This section briefly introduces some of the issues that are influencing excessive numbers of Hispanics and Native Americans to dropout of New Mexico's schools.

High school completion rates have been steadily increasing for the total school-age population over the past 25 years; the completion rate for Hispanics, however, has remained constant at a level significantly lower than the total population, and lower than other race-ethnicity groups. Nationally, the Hispanic dropout rate has stayed between 30 and 35 percent, compared to 15 to 17 percent for the total population (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). Socio-economic class is an important factor in predicting dropouts, and holds true for Hispanics as well. However, when socio-economic class is controlled for, Hispanics still have a higher probability of dropping out than non-Hispanics (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). In other words, middle class and upper-middle class Hispanics are more likely to dropout than non-Hispanic, middle and upper-middle class students. Furthermore, data indicates that the high dropout rates for Hispanic students holds regardless of immigrant status or home language (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). This means that recent immigrants from Latin America and second and third generation Hispanics are both dropping out at high levels, as are Hispanic students who speak English at home and those who speak Spanish in the home.

According to the *Hispanic Dropout Project* (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a), many Hispanic students are pushed out of schools. They attend schools with below-average physical conditions and educational resources, and often encounter personal prejudices and demeaning treatment from school personnel. Under these conditions, dropping out becomes a viable option rather than remaining in an institution where one is

unwanted and held in disregard. As one student remarked, "The American Dream is not for me. Why bother?" (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a)

Though dropout rates vary by community, there is widespread agreement that the dropout problem for Native Americans is serious and complex, rooted in cultural, societal, and socio-economic conditions. Among the reasons cited to explain the dropout problem in Indian country include cultural preservation and resistance (Dehyle, 1992), cultural discontinuity (Reyhner, 1992; Backes, 1993; Garrett, 1995), and power relations within schools (Ledlow, 1992; McLaughlin, 1994).

The study of Native American culture is complex because, contrary to common perception, Native American culture is not homogenous (Garrett, 1995). In the United States, there are 252 languages spoken by 505 federally recognized tribes, and 365 state recognized tribes (Garrett, 1995). In addition, there is variety in the degree to which the traditional cultural values are transmitted in the home, and the tribal customs are practiced in the community. Despite the differences, similarities exist in the way that Native Americans interact with the 'mainstream' culture.

Dehyle (1992) found that maintaining cultural integrity through resistance to schools was an important factor in Navajo and Ute decisions to dropout. The four-year ethnographic study of Navajo and Ute school dropouts included 1,489 student subjects, hundreds of ethnographic interviews, and school and community observations. Students with strong identities as "Navajo," generally developed in the home and community, were more likely to resist the school and attempt to preserve their identity.

Cultural discontinuity, described as "when two worlds collide" (Garrett, 1995, p. 192) has become an increasingly common explanation for Native American school dropout, as well as for other language-minority students. Dropout is viewed as a result of the intersection of mainstream American culture and Native American culture, where the inherent differences lead to conflict, and ultimately to high rates of dropout among minority culture students (Reyhner, 1992). According to Garrett (1995), the major cultural

differences include family relationships, the conception of property, and the values of sharing and community (as opposed to individualism and competition). Ledlow (1992) asserts that the research evidence for cultural discontinuity as an explanation for why students leave school is inconclusive and inadequate. In her work, she cites racism and discrimination against Native Americans as a more prevalent reason why Indian youth leave school before graduation.

Confronting Discrimination and Poverty in the United States

Some scholars espouse the need for an anti-racist pedagogy in schools to counter entrenched societal and institutional racism (see for example, Thompson, 1997). Others argue that more attention needs to be given to the mass media which does far more to propagate racism, ethnic stereotypes and sexism than schools (Bartolome & Macedo, 1997). Finally, many scholars (see for example, Kozol, 1967) have highlighted that minority schools have fewer resources, older facilities, and poorly trained teachers in contrast to white, suburban schools. Clearly, society's inequities are mirrored in the schools. Apple (1996) writes that:

> *We must cease framing the question of how to respond to educational failures---and high school dropouts, in particular---so that the only solutions (in the form of teachers' practices, students' achievement, and legislators' policies) either entirely blame or completely credit the students, the teachers, and the schools for outcomes like dropout rates.*
>
> *The assumption that we will find long-term answers to the dropout dilemma and to the realities of poverty and unemployment by keeping our attention within the school, is dangerously naive. Lasting answers will require a much more searching set of economic, social, and political questions and a considerably more extensive restructuring of our social commitments. Further, these will need to be accompanied by the democratization of our accepted ways of distributing and controlling jobs, benefits, education, and power. Until we take these larger economic and social contexts as seriously as they deserve, we shall simply be unable to respond adequately to the needs of youth in this country, beyond providing an endless series of short-lived placebos.* (p. 70)

Apple continues by discussing how beyond the rhetoric of widespread economic growth in the United States is "a reality of crisis, an economy that increases the gap

between rich and poor" (1996, p. 71). One out of every seven Americans lives below the poverty line and one out of every four children under the age of 6 lives in poverty (Ellwood & Summers, 1986). According to Marian Wright Edelman (1994) of the Children's Defense Fund, the bottom line issue that must be resolved in the United States is poverty:

> *Child poverty stalks its survivors down every avenue of their lives. It places them at greater risk of hunger, homelessness, sickness, physical or mental disability, violence, educational failure, teen parenthood, and family stress, and deprives them of positive early childhood experiences and the adolescent stimulation and creative outlets that help prepare more affluent children for school and then college and work . . . . It is a miracle that the great majority of poor children stay in school, do not commit crimes, and strive to be productive citizens in a society that guarantees them a prison bed if they fail (for over $30,000 a year) but refuses to provide them a Head Start (for less than $3,800 a year) or a summer job (for less than $1,400) to help them succeed.* (p. xvii)

Ultimately, addressing the reasons why students dropout of school requires not only changing schools and expanding educational opportunities for *all* students, but also requires a commitment to abolishing poverty and restructuring our economic priorities. Apple (1996) believes that we must "challenge the social Darwinist assumptions that stand behind so much of our economic system" (p. 89). He writes that the poor and unemployed have not earned their plight. Instead, the economic system, with its emphasis on profit no matter what the social cost, has generated inequities in society. From this perspective, solutions to the high dropout rates require that we face this economic reality. At the very least, funding formulae for schools should overallocate to poor districts precisely because of the myriad and complexity of problems these districts face (Fine, 1991).

Dropout Prevention and Intervention

Michelle Fine (1991), in a comprehensive study of dropouts in New York City, depicted what public education represents to many students:

> *Low-income adolescents are telling us, in their words and in their absence, that educational structures, policies, and practices that may appear benign don't work. If a student has family or community responsibilities that can't wait or can't be forgotten until 3:00; if he or she doesn't enter school speaking standard English or has a disability; if his or her community, values, and heritage are discrepant from those*

> *represented in the faculty, the texts, and the curriculum at large; if a high school degree seems to be of questionable value; or if the world around him or her is filled with social fractures along race/ethnic, class, and gender lines, public education as currently practiced fails.*
>
> *For these students, the opportunity to a public education is hollow. It asks them to abandon family and community responsibilities; to sacrifice language, identity, and pride; to ignore the pain and suffering they witness around them and the culture and pleasure they take comfort in; and to deny fundamentally all that sits between their dreams and their circumstances, between the ideologies they so want to believe and the contradictions they so need to confront.* (p. 21)

In short, Fine's work informs us that schools need to be more flexible to recognize adolescents' familiar and community responsibilities, as well as more supportive of students' cultural and linguistic identities. According to the United States Department of Education (1998b), 77% of the reasons students cited for dropping were school-related problems. The most common reasons students report for leaving school included: failure or inability to get along with teachers (68%); dislike of school (46%); inability to get along with other students or felt they did not belong in school (40%); suspended or expelled (25%); and felt unsafe (10%). Though some of the reasons given by students for dropping out were family or job-related, the school-related reasons for dropping out of school were most commonly cited by students. Many students fall behind in their coursework (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a) and feel defeated in school. Others simply find schools to be unsafe and inhospitable places (Bingaman, 1998).

The focus in this section is on practical steps that can be taken to address the dropout problem. Interviews with students at three middle schools in different regions of New Mexico are presented to highlight the issues that affect students' decisions to stay in school or dropout. Students were interviewed in small groups at El Rey Middle School in southeastern New Mexico, Soaring Eagle Middle School in the western part of the state, and Monterey Middle School in northern New Mexico. A small group of parents were also interviewed at El Rey Middle School. The schools were selected for the study because they reflect the diversity of this land of enchantment. The population of El Rey is predominantly White and Hispanic, Soaring Eagle is composed almost entirely of Native American

students, and Monterey is majority Hispanic. All interview sessions took place with a random group of students at each school. In this way, it was ensured that a variety of students---low- and high-achieving, male and female, Hispanic, Native American and White---would share with us their perspectives about why their friends, cousins, brothers and sisters, and sometimes even the students themselves dropped out or considered dropping out of school.

The Students

A common theme that emerged from our interviews with the students was their belief that their teachers were mean, uncaring and biased against their cultures. Students at Soaring Eagle and Monterey middle schools complained that teachers called them embarrassing names that were degrading. Students at Soaring Eagle said that it was not uncommon for teachers to call them names like "hillbillies," and to make comments like "you're not the only Native Americans." At Monterey Middle School, students described how teachers and security guards stereotyped them as "delinquent," and as a result, they were not encouraged to do better in school. In general, these students perceived that they were treated more unfairly than the good kids and that teachers really did not care about them. According to one student, the teachers pretended to like him, but they actually did not.

Many of the students discussed how they were dealing with a variety of issues at home and how their teachers "don't understand what you're going through." At Soaring Eagle, students explained that many students dropped out because of the problems that their friends were dealing with in the home. Many were faced with alcoholism, abuse, violence, divorce and other issues. They did not think that their teachers understood these issues and were insensitive to the difficulties that they were handling at home. For some students, school was a refuge from a bad home situation.

Students at El Rey spoke about how their school felt like a prison. Many classrooms lacked windows and security cameras were being installed throughout the school to track drug trafficking and gang activity. They also described how the police were now present on campus, both in the school building and outside "circling the school." We wondered about the messages that such heightened security gave the students. What are we communicating to students who enroll in debilitated school buildings, regularly have classes with more than 30 other students, study in libraries with out-of-date collections, and attend schools with sophisticated security apparatuses?

Students at all three schools discussed how their friends, parents, extracurricular activities, field trips, and hands-on learning motivated them to stay in school. At El Rey Middle School, several students said that friends and their parents kept them going to school. Students at all three schools indicated that they went to school to be with their friends. All also discussed how their parents expected them to stay in school. "My parents would kill me if I didn't go to school," said one student at El Rey. Students at Soaring Eagle talked about the value of organizations like the MESA program that offered them opportunities to participate in a variety of activities. Athletics were also commonly cited by students at the three schools as a big motivator to stay in school. The parents interviewed at El Rey said that their children were extremely concerned about keeping their grade point averages high enough to remain eligible for sports. Frequently, students said school was boring and that they wanted to go on more field trips. In all of our interviews, students expressed unanimous support for experiential learning. They felt that this sort of learning was interesting and the most relevant to them. Honor students at Monterey Middle School discussed the importance of "hands-on" activities to keep students interested in learning. Students wanted to be actively involved in the learning process.

Parents and Families

A common stereotype about minority families is that the parents are indifferent to the children's education and do not want to become literate in English. Parents are often characterized as "ignorant, poor, products of bad schools, in conflict with their children, and in general, culturally deprived," (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). However, the authors of *The Hispanic Dropout Project* (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a) observed Hispanic parents acting like any other parents of school children: they worked with schools and community organizations, valued learning, and supported their children in school:

> *Many high-risk children and their parents are blamed and not treated with respect by educators. Highest risk students and their parents are very responsive to genuine and meaningful offers of help despite cultural, language, and economic barriers.* Larson & Rumberger (1995, p. 21)

The parents at El Rey Middle School were quite articulate about the importance of parents being involved in their children's lives. They felt welcomed by teachers at El Rey and believed that more parents should become involved at the school and, at the very least, support their children at extracurricular activities. One parent summarized her beliefs succinctly: "if parents don't care, the kids don't care." Certainly, many parents are busy trying to make a living, but these parents were adamant that they can still make an effort to occasionally attend sporting events their children are participating in, and generally take an interest in their child's life. One parent said that she believes too many parents blame schools and society in general for their children's problems. She thinks parents need to "stop blaming teachers and schools" and start taking more responsibilities for their children's well-being.

One parent from El Rey expressed concern that teachers were not properly preparing her children for the academic demands of high school:

> *My concern is next year she's [her daughter] going to be in high school and if she doesn't get her basics now, then when she's going to be in high school she's not going to know it, or she's going to be behind. I don't think that's good for them.*

The parents were also aware that some of the teachers at El Rey were teaching subjects that were not their primary areas of expertise:

> *I won't mention any names, but I just feel like some of these teachers that we hired are not hired for the position they should be in. I just feel like one of my daughters is not learning anything, and she's in an honors class. And I feel like she needs to be where she can learn something.*

Students at Soaring Eagle Middle School discussed how they felt stressed. They described the economic difficulties their families were dealing with, the fights they witnessed between their parents, and how drinking and drug abuse were common in their homes. They also said they knew many adults who were in jail and that murder in their community was not uncommon. The economic and social problems faced in Native American communities is well-documented in the United States. School faculty and staff need to consider these issues and how they impact their students.

New Mexico Senator Jeff Bingaman (1998) advocates providing courses for parents and support groups to help address students' needs and to support students' academic progress. He believes that a primary goal of these programs should be to further the development of students' self-esteem. In addition, educational programs provide parents with training in literacy and work skills. Senator Bingaman (1998) emphasizes that these programs are intended to make the potential benefits of staying in school apparent both to parents and their children.

Teachers

Many studies have found that teachers play a vital role in keeping students in school by taking an interest in the students as individuals. Uncaring teachers are often cited as a major reason why students drop out (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). Clearly, the teacher's role is crucial in stemming dropouts.

Alternative programs are often cited as beneficial for potential dropouts because of their focus on giving students individual attention and developing personalized relationships between teachers and students. According to a student at Monterey Middle School, good

teachers relate well to students and understand where they are coming from. Good teachers take the time to talk to their students and they are there for the students when the students need help. Students at all three sites complained that many of their teachers did not care about them, were out to get them, were unprepared to teach, and were even abusive. One student from Soaring Eagle described how some of his teachers called him degrading names and made derogatory comments about his tribe's culture. He said he wants to have more Navajo teachers. Our experiences at the three schools made it clear to us that students felt very strongly that too many of their teachers were unfamiliar with many of their cultural traditions. Certainly, staff development needs to focus on preparing teachers and administrators to work in multicultural settings. Ongoing workshops need to be available to school personnel that validate diverse students' cultures and languages. These efforts are vital in New Mexico where the majority of students come from minority populations.

Teachers can engage in ongoing professional development activities with the support of colleagues and others over sustained periods of time. Deborah Meier boasts about Central Park East in east Harlem that, "it's its own staff development project" (p. 109, 1995). Central Park East has gained renown as a model for how a low-achieving, inner-city high school with a high dropout rate can be transformed into a high-achieving school with almost a non-existent dropout rate. Meier, the principal at Central Park East during its renaissance, believes that it is vital for teachers to have access to continued and sustained professional development activities (1995). An integral part of the daily schedule at Central Park East included time for teachers to meet to support each other's professional growth. Time is established and used by teachers to meet regularly. In studies of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, Stiegler and Hiebert (1997) described how Japanese teachers work together on mathematics lessons continually, refining and improving both their curriculum and instructional techniques.

The built-in teacher support network at Central Park East counteracted a culture of teacher isolation that is common in schools, especially at the secondary level. When

possible, teachers in the same subject area or teachers interested in doing cross-disciplinary work together need to be placed in adjacent classrooms to increase opportunities to collaborate on curriculum and instruction. If schools are going to implement higher academic standards, teachers will need more opportunities to collaborate and support one another.

Schools

While students at El Rey Middle School described that their school felt like a prison, students at Monterey Middle School attended classes in an antiquated, dilapidated building. Our interview session at Monterey was held in a classroom used for home economics. Students explained that none of the appliances in the room functioned, making it impossible for them to do even basic cooking. Though the facilities at Soaring Eagle Middle School appeared to be in good physical condition, an issue at the school was that most, if not all, of the teachers were recruited from outside of the community. As noted in the previous section, a student at Soaring Eagle wanted more Navajo teachers at the school. Clearly, ongoing efforts to recruit and retain more Native Americans and Hispanics into teaching need to be continued and intensified.

If students, parents, and teachers are the most important people to affect an individual's decision to dropout, then schools are the setting where the dropout problem can be prevented. The research conducted by *The Hispanic Dropout Project* (HDP) concluded that "schools do matter in the lives of its students," (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a, p. 31). The five characteristics that HDP found in successful schools are: 1) high academic and behavioral standards; 2) clear conveyance of these standards to the students; 3) facilitation of close relationships with adults; 4) demonstration of the connection between school and future work or college education; and 5) keeping the families informed (1998a, p. 33).

After meeting with hundreds of students throughout the country, the authors of the HDP found that Hispanic students overwhelmingly want to learn, value education, and work at doing well in school (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). Nevertheless, negative stereotypes have often led to a lowering of academic expectations to match the perceived deficiencies of Hispanic and Native American students. *All* students, not just an elite few, deserve access to a high-quality education.

A variety of programs focus on providing services to young children to support their early academic development. Head Start is frequently cited (see for example, Grant Foundation, 1988) as the prototype program for providing a comprehensive mix of educational, social, medical, dental, nutritional and mental health services to low-income preschoolers and their families. Many academic programs in elementary schools focus on developing children's literacy skills. National programs such as "Success for All" (SFA) have proved extremely successful for improving children's literacy skills at a rapid pace. Whiie this program has been criticized for its inflexibility, teachers follow rigid scripts during instruction, early elementary students in SFA programs have consistently demonstrated increased proficiency on reading tests.

In smaller schools, teachers mold closer relationships with their students. By working with 80 students each day instead of 150 (not uncommon at the secondary level), teachers can more effectively meet students' personal and academic needs. Studies have found that smallness is especially beneficial for at-risk students who have been shown to be more involved and to achieve at higher levels at schools in which students can form close relationships with teachers (Oxley and McCabe 1990, Summers and Wolfe 1976, Wehlage et al. 1987). Working with fewer students allows teachers to have a greater understanding of their students' content knowledge. In small schools then, it is more possible to structure curriculum and instruction to the individual needs of students.

The HDP also recommends that schools and the community create stronger links between school and work (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). Though this does not

entail tracking students into vocational training programs, the report does recommend creating more flexible scheduling so that students can work while still continuing their education. Programs such as the Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) and Career Explorations (Fine, 1991) integrate employment experience, attention to personal and health problems, and basic academic skills instruction for potential dropouts in New York City. This combination of work, "life skills," and academic remediation was evaluated as especially effective for undermining the typical summer loss of skills in reading and mathematics. Students in the program also demonstrated increased contraceptive knowledge (Fine, 1991).

District, State, and National Policies

Policies at the national, state, and local levels can have an effect on whether students stay in school or dropout. Clearly, the state needs to provide dedicated financial support for effective dropout intervention and prevention programs. As school districts implement new strategies to stem student dropout, tested as well as untried approaches need to be supported while studies are undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of programs. Senator Bingaman (1998) has also articulated the importance of accurate reporting of dropout statistics. He believes that the state should establish policies that would require school districts to provide annual and four-year data on students that could be reported to the public in a comprehensive manner.

Another persistent problem is that incentives that 'push' students out of school are common in some districts. The practice of basing school funding on a one-time student census is an example; once the census numbers are taken, there is no longer any incentive for the school to retain students, and in fact, it is to their economic advantage to allow students to leave. This practice is particularly prevalent in overcrowded and underfunded schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). Senator Bingaman has articulated the need to reward schools for keeping students in school (Baker, 1999).

Fine (1991) writes that districts committed to decreasing the dropout rate will need time to design and implement new programs, must be allowed the flexibility to change these programs and to make mistakes, and most importantly, will have to commit resources for the long-term for these programs to be effective. The evaluation of how successful districts are addressing the dropout issue could include assessment of the degree of community involvement in schools, parents' sense of being welcomed, whether or not schools in the district reflect upon their practices (e.g., retention and promotion policies, suspension and discharge practices, tracking, services provided, and special education placement), and how effective staff development efforts are by the district on issues of race, class, gender, disability, and sexual orientation (Friend, 1989).

Community-Based Organizations, Business, and the Larger Community

At the local level, non-government groups such as community-based organizations or the local business community can provide supplementary help to prevent students from dropping out of school. They can provide help in the area of school-to-work transitions and basic job training, serving their own interest in the quality of their workforce. In addition to job training, community organizations could support school-based child care for teenage mothers (Fine, 1991), and create programs for mentoring, tutoring, and scholarships for college (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). The community can also support youth programs that sponsor extracurricular programs (Bingaman, 1998). Students at Soaring Eagle said that there was no place for them to go in their community for recreation after school. They articulated that many of their friends were getting into trouble simply because they had nothing else to do. Plainly, directed activities in the community are beneficial for teenagers once the school day is over.

In Appendix A, a sample of programs that are designed to decrease the dropout rate throughout New Mexico is provided. Many of the programs listed are supported by local communities and businesses. For example, a partnership between Albuquerque Public

In Appendix A, a sample of programs that are designed to decrease the dropout rate throughout New Mexico is provided. Many of the programs listed are supported by local communities and businesses. For example, a partnership between Albuquerque Public Schools and the Hispano Chamber of Commerce grants financial support for students to enroll in college and helps place students in the workplace. In Roswell and Carlsbad, community members serve in the schools as tutors, mentors, and reading partners in a program called HOSTS. Other programs that demonstrate how communities and businesses can partner with schools to lower the dropout rate include the Career Development Program. This program in Las Cruces includes paid work experiences for juniors in high school.

Research and Development

The Hispanic Dropout Project recommends that much research and development of new, innovative programs to prevent students from dropping out of school is needed (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). New programs as well as existing programs should be empirically tested for efficacy to accomplish their goals. This is important because the current research is fragmentary and studies tend to focus on issues in isolation. More studies need to link how specific intervention programs keep students in school. These studies and their findings should be widely published and disseminated (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a).

President Clinton and Secretary of Education Riley have made higher standards a priority in schools across the country (U.S. Department of Education, 1998c). This strategy may have an undesired impact on traditionally disadvantaged groups such as Hispanics, Native Americans, Limited English Proficiency (LEP) students, and other groups with high dropout rates. Higher academic standards may increase the dropout rate unless concurrent strategies are developed and implemented to support students who are at-risk of dropping out. Studies indicate that tougher school standards and grade retention

lead to an increased incidence of student dropout (McDill, Natriello & Pallas; 1985, 1986).

Despite research that suggests that retention of students at the same grade level for consecutive years "confers no lasting benefit" to students, retention has become quite a popular practice (Natriello, 1998, p. 15). Among the alternatives to retention, include: year-round schools (Ordovensky, 1988), evening and weekend classes, ungraded classes, tutoring by "at-risk" youths for younger students (Riessman & Collins, 1987), cooperative learning (which is particularly effective with low- to median-achieving students: see Johnson et al., 1985; Neumann, 1987), the accumulation of credits rather than the rigid promotion (or not) from grade to grade in high school, and two years of schooling with the same teacher or class to ensure consistency and continuity (Fine, 1991).

Concluding Comments

Ultimately, there is no single method for decisively preventing students from dropping out of school. The dropout problem is a complex, social phenomena that is intimately tied to individual people and their relationships with students, teachers, school personnel, role models, and family. There are, however, numerous strategies and methods which will greatly increase the likelihood of students staying in school (see Appendix A for listing of programs throughout New Mexico). National, state and local policies can make a difference by creating conditions that lessen the difficulties for groups in school that have a high risk of dropping out. In all of the reports on dropouts, the most common theme for solutions to the problem is manifesting a personal interest in the individual personality, interests, and life of the student. Words like respect, attention, awareness, encouragement, and pride were commonly used both in the reports and by the students that were interviewed as part of *The Hispanic Dropout Project* (U.S. Department of Education, 1998a). Until *all* children are perceived as being worthy of attention, and essentially worthy of a good education and a good life, school will continue to be a place where certain children are sorted and discarded.

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Appendix A: Dropout Prevention Programs in New Mexico

Information about dropout prevention programs throughout New Mexico is provided in this section. We would like to acknowledge Senator Bingaman's office for compiling the programs listed here (1998). We contacted each program to update or revise the information given in Senator Bingaman's report. We have simply reproduced the section on preventive programs from Senator Bingaman's report if no changes to the programs were reported to us.

Statewide

Alternative High Schools. (505) 827-6508

There are at present 22 recognized alternative high schools in the State, located in Albuquerque, Las Cruces, Santa Fe, Hobbs, and Deming. Alternative high schools are generally small schools with programs tailored to fit the needs of a range of students, including pregnant teens, students who have been suspended or expelled from school, and students who are former dropouts.

New Mexico MESA. (505) 262-1200

New Mexico MESA attempts to make college a realistic goal for 3,400 New Mexico students in grades 6 through 12. Students participate in science and mathematics activities and are eligible for incentive awards.

GRADS. (505) 827-2370

GRADS serves 650 teen parents and 250 children in 22 high schools around New Mexico. The program supports students through a variety of methods and has been especially successful at lowering repeat pregnancies among its students.

Talent Search. (214) 880-3048

Talent Search is part of the TRIO Program supported by the U.S. Department of Education. Operating through funded projects in Portales, Roswell, and Albuquerque, Talent Search is working with students in grades 6 through 12 to encourage first-generation college students to continue their education.

Upward Bound. (214) 880-3048

Providing more intensive services than Talent Search, Upward Bound is another TRIO Program that is currently supporting five university-based awards that operate in Albuquerque, Roswell, Portales, Las Vegas and Las Cruces. Six week summer programs on campuses help familiarize hundreds of New Mexico students with college-level work and experiences.

Boys and Girls Club. (505) 247-1553

The Boys and Girls Club provides a safe place for youth from disadvantaged circumstances to learn and grow. They concentrate on offering programs and activities to keep youth off the streets after school and on the weekends.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters. (505) 837-9223

Big Brothers/Big Sisters of Central New Mexico, Inc. is an incorporated, non-profit agency which has provided one-to-one mentoring services to youth for nearly 30 years. The program currently serves 500 children a year, with a professional case management staff to screen volunteers and children and monitor matches.

Re: Learning NM. (505) 983-0404

This program focuses on retraining teachers for work in alternative high schools and with at risk youth. It teaches teachers new methods of instruction.

Albuquerque

Project Succeed. (505) 831-6038

Operated by Albuquerque's Youth Development Inc, Project Succeed serves approximately 500 high school students at eight area schools through smaller class size, counseling, and after-school work programs. It has an 87% retention rate for individuals most at risk of dropping out.

Choices Program. (505) 842-9003

This school-to-work program at Bernalillo High School, Del Norte High School, Cibolla High School and Albuquerque High School is the product of a partnership between the school district and the Hispano Chamber of Commerce. The program opens doors to college and the workplace.

LULAC Middle School Initiative. (505) 243-3787

Students in grades 7 and 8 are at a crucial developmental stage, and this program works with 200 Hispanic students to make college part of their vision for the future.

Puente Project. (505) 873-8347

Technical Vocational Institute (TVI) has partnered with an elementary school with more than 90% low income students to increase awareness of mathematics and science education and careers. More than 100 4th graders at East San José Elementary school visit the TVI campus and participate in follow-up activities provided by TVI.

Project Success. (505) 827-1213

Funded through the federal National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership Program and coordinated by the New Mexico Commission on Higher Education, Project Success works with 400 students from nine elementary schools.

Project Achieve. (505) 831-6038

This project targets at-risk 7th and 8th graders at Ernie Pyle Middle School in Albuquerque. A health educator goes to the school and works with the students in the areas of mathematics, English, and personal health.

Futures for Children. (505) 821-2828

Futures for Children began in 1968 as the Friendship program to help Native American students. The program provides mentors for students to assist them increase their self-esteem, build self-reliance, and gain skills to become active community members.

College Bound Program. (505) 837-7562

This program focuses on grades 3 through 5, primarily at schools where dropout rates are the highest. Approximately 800 to 1,000 of the 1,500 students being served are located in Albuquerque. A core element of the program includes assigning a college or vocational student to work with a classroom for a semester sharing experiences of college life.

ORALE. (505) 277-5183

The ORALE project ("Offering Resources and Learning Empowerment") pairs college students from UNM with at-risk high school students from four APS high schools. More than 150 students are now participating and the program has shown success in increasing grade advancement.

Farmington

Rocinante High School. (505) 599-8627

Rocinante High School is an alternative school that provides flexible opportunities for at-risk students who wish to complete high school but cannot do so in a traditional

environment. Rocinante uses a modular schedule and houses students ages 15 and up, with no limit on age. There were over 60 graduates in 1998.

Day Reporting School. (505) 599-8650

Farmington Day Reporting School is a cooperative effort between Farmington Municipal Schools and the Farmington Boys and Girls Club. The school targets approximately 28-36 students, grades 7-12, that have been suspended from regular programs in the Farmington Municipal School system. Students are on a modular schedule.

Santa Fe

Students Offering Services. (505) 428-1736

A federal grant is supporting Students Offering Service, a program in three Santa Fe schools that is bringing Americorps volunteers together with approximately 300 at-risk students. Mentoring by undergraduate students focuses on making positive educational choices.

Santa Fe SER Academy. (505) 473-0428

Started in 1993 as the Youth Empowerment Strategies project, a Department of Labor grant resulted in the creation in 1996 of the Santa Fe SER Academy, an alternative high school program co-located with Service Employment Redevelopment (SER), and Santa Fe Jobs for Progress, Inc. The Academy is a school-to-work program serving approximately 250 at-risk students.

ACAT. (505) 989-5507

Approximately 100 Santa Fe students, grades 9-12, are served by this program. Students earn regular high school credits in all subjects (except mathematics) in a team-taught interdisciplinary program. Media literacy is the program core through which academics are

taught. Special projects include TV, video, sound production, music composition and desktop publishing as electives. There is a mandatory 2 hour/week community service requirement.

At-Risk Training Program. (800) 456-2673 ext. 6578

This masters degree program is offered through the School of Education at the College of Santa Fe which is designed to train future teachers interested in working with at-risk youth. The program provides training in methods of instruction for alternative schools.

Roswell and Carlsbad

University High School. (505) 625-8245

Established in 1984 to serve at-risk students, this program provides a variety of instructional approaches to suit diverse student needs, with an emphasis on empowering students to be responsible for their own education.

Success for All. (505) 625-8156

Roswell was the first district in the state to adopt the Success for All model of school reform and dropout prevention using federal Title I funding. Over 500 schools nationwide have adopted the model, which focuses on improving elementary school children's reading proficiency.

Coalition for Youth. (505) 627-6978

The Roswell school system is one of several that have conducted the Benson Survey, through which a community's developmental assets are assessed. In May of 1996, more than 4,000 students grades 6 through 12 provided information that created a "snapshot" of the County and led to the establishment of a non-profit organization called Coalition for Youth.

Career Search. (505) 625-8100

This project currently serves 25 9th graders enrolled in the Roswell Independent School District. It offers career search and exploration courses which include work site visits, classroom instruction and an orientation to college with an emphasis on continuing education on the campus at ENMU.

Educational Talent Search. (800) 243-6687 ext. 201

There are approximately 1,000 participants, grades 6 through 12. All students participating are low-income and potential first-generation college students. Talent Search provides counseling and support services such as tutoring and mentoring to encourage and assist potential first-generation college youth to gain access to higher education.

HOSTS. (505) 625-8249

HOSTS (Helping One Student To Succeed) is a strategy that brings members of the community into the school to serve as tutors, mentors and reading partners for students identified as needing extra help. The community partners come to the school once a week and work one-on-one with a specific child.

Las Cruces, Gadsden, and Cobre

Valued Youth. (210) 684-8180

The Coca Cola Valued Youth program pairs 18 at-risk students at Snell Middle School and Cobre High School with 50 at-risk students at Bayard Elementary School in need of academic tutoring. Operating since 1984, the program has been implemented and evaluated at dozens of schools in Texas and other states with dramatic effects.